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1 **Magma pressurisation sustains ongoing eruptive episode at dome-building Soufrière Hills**

2 **Volcano**

3

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5

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12 **ABSTRACT**

13

14 Dome-building volcanoes, where long-term eruptive episodes can be interspersed with periods of
15 intra-eruptive repose, are particularly challenging for volcanic hazard assessment. Defining the end of
16 eruptive episodes is vitally important for the socio-economic recovery of affected communities, but
17 highly problematic due to the potential for rapid transition from prolonged, seemingly low-risk, repose
18 to dangerous effusive or explosive activity. It is currently unclear what constitutes the end of repose
19 and an eruptive episode. Here we show that analysis of surface deformation can characterise repose
20 and help define an eruptive episode. At Soufrière Hills volcano (SHV) the long-term post-2010
21 deformation at 12 cGPS stations requires the pressure in the magma system to increase with time;
22 time-dependent stress relaxation or crustal creep cannot explain the deformation trends alone.
23 Continued pressurisation within the magmatic system during repose could initiate a renewed eruption,
24 qualifying as sustained unrest and therefore continuation of the eruptive episode. For SHV, persistent
25 magma pressurisation highlights the need for sustained vigilance in the monitoring and management
26 of the volcano and its surroundings, despite the last eruptive activity ending in 2010. Our results show
27 promise for application to other dome-building volcanoes.

28

29 **INTRODUCTION**

30

31 Dome-building volcanoes evolve through a process of lava dome formation, with three main states:
32 inter-eruptive repose (dormant); eruption; and intra-eruptive repose (unrest during eruptive episode)
33 (Sheldrake et al., 2016). Eruption is mostly through effusive dome extrusion, but sudden transitions to
34 explosive behaviour are possible (Sparks, 1997; Ogburn et al., 2015); surface deformation commonly
35 accompanies these eruptions and the associated unrest (e.g., Sheldrake et al., 2016). A period of
36 intra-eruptive repose classifies an eruptive episode as continuing, a consequence of the repetitive and
37 cyclic process of dome extrusion and destruction (Sparks, 1997; Ogburn et al., 2015; Sheldrake et al.,
38 2016; Wolpert et al., 2016). However, distinguishing intra-eruptive repose from inter-eruptive repose,
39 through the presence or absence, respectively, of concerning geophysical or geochemical monitoring
40 signals, is difficult (Sheldrake et al., 2016), and complicates how the end of an eruptive episode is

41 determined. Consequently, the socio-economic recovery of affected communities can be severely
42 impaired, and dome-building volcanoes are particularly challenging for hazard and risk assessment.
43

44 Volcano surface deformation is a common sign of volcanic unrest (Phillipson et al., 2013); deciphering
45 its cause is fundamental for monitoring and hazard mitigation. Magma supply (Gottsmann and Odbert,
46 2014; Odbert et al., 2014; Hickey et al., 2016) and crystallisation with volatile exsolution (Caricchi et
47 al., 2014) have been proposed as magmatic drivers of uplift, but tectonic (Bonforte et al., 2017),
48 hydrothermal (Fournier and Chardot, 2012) and viscoelastic (Segall, 2016, 2018) processes can also
49 sustain volcano deformation. The variety of different mechanisms present contrasting interpretations
50 of magma system evolution (Head et al., 2019; Pritchard et al., 2019). Deformation related solely to
51 viscoelasticity might indicate a constant or reducing pressure in the magmatic system (Head et al.,
52 2019), a decrease in eruption potential, and at dome-building volcanoes relate to inter-eruptive
53 repose. Conversely, deformation from magma supply might indicate increased eruption potential with
54 cause for concern, signifying intra-eruptive repose. Uncertainty in the cause of deformation, and
55 characterising periods of repose, is problematic and complicates eruption forecasting, hazard
56 assessment and risk mitigation (Pritchard et al., 2019).

57

58 Soufrière Hills Volcano (SHV) is an andesitic dome-building volcano in Montserrat (Figure 1) and
59 began its current eruptive episode in 1995, fed from a consistent reservoir 6 – 13 km deep (Odbert et
60 al., 2014). Eruptive activity has been intermittent (Sparks and Young, 2002; Wadge et al., 2014) with
61 periods of intra-eruptive repose generally lasting 1-2 years (Supplementary Figure 1). However, the
62 most recent eruption ended in February 2010 making the current repose period the longest yet
63 recorded. SO₂ observations at SHV since 2010 show steady emissions at an average rate of 374
64 t/day (Supplementary Figure 1), fumaroles on the lava dome maintain temperatures up to 610°C and
65 swarms of volcano-tectonic (VT) earthquakes have also been recorded (Christopher et al., 2015).

66 Continuous GPS (cGPS) measurements show island-wide inflation from 2010 onwards (Figure 1),
67 and are similar to deformation patterns commonly observed at other dome-building volcanoes
68 (Sheldrake et al., 2016). Globally, 94% of dome-building eruptive episodes last less than 20 years
69 (Wolpert et al., 2016). The current 12-year cessation of surface activity, following 15 years of
70 intermittent activity, raises the question of whether the current repose is temporary or, instead,

71 indicative of the end of the eruptive episode. The ambiguity is exacerbated by the presence of surface
72 deformation whose driving processes remain unclear. The longevity of the current repose, and
73 suggestions based on geochemical data that magma supply to SHV potentially ceased in mid-2003
74 (McGee et al., 2019), may indicate that non-magmatic processes (e.g., viscoelastic crustal behaviour
75 (Segall, 2016)) are now driving the continued deformation. To assess the behaviour and evolution of
76 the SHV magmatic system since 2010 and the nature of the current repose, we analyse the temporal
77 deformation trends using geodetic numerical models and test the hypothesis that viscoelastic crustal
78 behaviour is driving long-term surface inflation.

79

80 **DEFORMATION MODELLING**

81

82 The geodetic models used in this study incorporate a temperature-dependent viscoelastic crustal
83 rheology, topography and 3D variations in mechanical properties (Figure 2); the methods (see
84 Supplemental Material¹) are easily applicable to other volcanoes by adapting volcano-specific
85 parameters. Our model outputs are directly compared to the 2010-2018 deformation recorded at 12
86 cGPS sites in all 3 components (Figure 1 & Supplementary Figure 2), ensuring the widest possible
87 model-data evaluation. The models are driven using one of four time-dependent source functions, to
88 simulate first-order differences in the temporal evolution of the magmatic system (Figure 3). Stress-
89 based overpressure (ΔP) and strain-based volume change (ΔV) boundary conditions are compared.

90

91 The four time-dependent source functions produce very different modelled surface displacement
92 timeseries (Figure 3), but when compared, clear deformation patterns emerge. When the magma
93 reservoir is in a steady state (Figure 3E), we observe minor amounts of viscoelastic creep (producing
94 inflation) for the ΔP models and relaxation (resulting in subsidence) for the ΔV models. In both cases
95 the rate-decreasing viscoelastic surface deformation becomes insignificant after ~4 years. In contrast,
96 to produce near constant-rate continuous deformation, and/or substantial deformation over timescales
97 greater than 4 years, requires increasing reservoir pressure or volume (Figures 3F&H). We
98 additionally note that for elastic models their temporal surface deformation results would mirror the
99 time-dependent source functions (Head et al., 2019).

100

101 Model results obtained with the ramp source function provide our best-fit to the observed temporal
102 deformation trends (Figure 4). The data show increasing deformation at a near-constant rate between
103 early-2010 and late-2018 (Figure 1), which is only achievable using the ramped source function. The
104 resultant comparison between the normalised modelled and observed displacements shows a very
105 close match in the temporal patterns (Figure 4A-C & Supplementary Figure 5). Some misfits do
106 remain, particularly in the E-W components, and this is likely due to the limited distribution of GPS
107 stations in an E-W plane due to the geography of the island, which prevents detection of peak E-W
108 deformation magnitudes. Therefore, source geometries optimised on GPS data (like that employed in
109 our study) are likely poor at recreating E-W surface deformation. We also do not account for sediment
110 loading (Odbert et al., 2015). Comparisons between the absolute modelled and observed temporal
111 displacements also show a close match (Figure 4D-F & Supplementary Figure 6) and could possibly
112 be improved further by focussing on the spatial patterns of displacement to optimise a pressure or
113 volume change.

114

115 **MAGMA SYSTEM PRESSURISATION**

116

117 Our results indicate that viscoelastic crustal deformation alone cannot explain the amplitude or
118 temporal pattern of ongoing long-term surface deformation observed at SHV since 2010. Continued
119 deformation over the timescales recorded in the cGPS data are only achievable when the magma
120 reservoir is subject to an increasing pressure or volume. We compared both ΔP and ΔV source
121 boundary conditions, with viscoelasticity producing increasing uplift (via creep) in the ΔP models, and
122 post-uplift subsidence (via relaxation) in the ΔV models. For the thermomechanical conditions inferred
123 beneath SHV, the choice of ΔP or ΔV is arbitrary when using our best-fit ramp source function as their
124 viscous effects are indistinguishable on the timescales observed; they are constantly overprinted by
125 elastic deformation from the increasing pressure or volume change (due to Boltzmann superposition
126 (Hickey et al., 2016)), producing a near-linear temporal uplift pattern. Consequently, their normalised
127 temporal deformation trends are broadly equal (Figure 4). The near-linear temporal dependence
128 between all source functions and their surface deformation response is consistent and reflects the
129 thermomechanical conditions beneath SHV. It is noted, however, that the effects of viscoelasticity
130 produce elevated uplift for the ΔP case when compared to a purely elastic model.

131

132 The increasing magma reservoir pressure or volume at SHV since 2010 could be caused by a variety
133 of mechanisms. The most natural driving force to assume is renewed or continued magma supply,
134 which could initially seem in contrast to a proposed stop in magma supply in 2003 inferred from
135 geochemical results (McGee et al., 2019). However, magma supply could still be driving this
136 deformation if the magma supplied from a deep source region between ~2003 and present is still
137 being stored within the shallow magmatic system and has not been erupted. A scenario of continued
138 magma supply implies SHV may have only erupted magma supplied pre-2003 in the 2003-2010
139 period, which are subsequently recorded in the geochemical results (McGee et al., 2019). Continued
140 magma supply would also be consistent with post-2003 eruptive activity and high temperature
141 fumaroles (Christopher et al., 2015), and could be driven in part by degassing that maintains a
142 pressure gradient between shallow magma storage and deeper magma production (Girona et al.,
143 2015).

144

145 Alternative mechanisms to explain the inferred increasing pressure or volume relate to the role of
146 volatiles in the magmatic system. Volatile exsolution caused by magma crystallisation (second boiling)
147 can drive volume increases within a magma reservoir (Caricchi et al., 2014, 2021). However, it is
148 beyond the scope of this paper to test whether a second boiling process alone can generate the
149 necessary pressurisation to explain the observed deformation, especially in an open system emitting
150 significant amounts of SO₂ (Christopher et al., 2015). It is also conceivable that a steady supply of
151 volatiles, originating from a deeper source region and decoupled from the melt, is fluxing upwards
152 through the system (Christopher et al., 2015; Caricchi et al., 2018). If the volume supplied to the
153 shallower system is greater than the volume lost (where volatile pathways to the surface are
154 established and sustained, accounting for the steady gas emission rates (Christopher et al., 2015)),
155 then excess volatiles may accumulate and promote surface deformation. Alternatively, accumulation
156 of exsolved volatiles may be driving the recorded deformation through the segregation, reorganisation
157 and/or compaction of a transcrustal magmatic system (TCMS; Christopher et al., 2015; Cashman et
158 al., 2017). In this scenario, volatiles could drive deformation without magma supply by buoyantly
159 accumulating while a hot crystal mush is destabilised and reorganised. Several studies have
160 suggested a TCMS beneath SHV (Christopher et al., 2015; Edmonds et al., 2016; Paulatto et al.,

161 2019), and our model source geometry could be representative of a broad, distributed network of melt
162 storage in a TCMS (Gottsmann et al., 2020).

163

164 **SUSTAINING AN ERUPTIVE EPISODE**

165

166 The different magmatic processes suggested as possible causes for the surface deformation promote
167 increases in reservoir pressure and/or volume. We cannot distinguish between pressure and volume
168 boundary conditions for our best-fit ramp source function due to the similar temporal deformation
169 trends they produce (Figures 3 and 4). Continued geophysical observations and additional gravity
170 data might be able to differentiate between the suggested driving mechanisms and the pressure or
171 volume boundary condition in the future. It is also possible that two or more of our suggested
172 mechanisms are occurring simultaneously, with or without viscoelastic deformation. Regardless, it is
173 clear from our results that viscoelastic crustal deformation alone cannot explain the ongoing
174 deformation, and some component of magma system pressurisation is required. Our methods can be
175 adapted to examine surface deformation at other dome-building volcanoes to shed further light on the
176 nature of repose periods.

177

178 Continued magma system pressurisation at SHV implies ongoing volcanic unrest, and therefore the
179 current repose could be classified as intra-eruptive. Despite its pressurising magmatic system, the
180 volcano has remained in a state of repose much longer than in earlier stages of the eruptive episode.

181 This highlights a change in magma system behaviour compared to pre-2010, and may imply that
182 deformation observed during previous intra-eruptive periods was driven by a different mechanism.

183 Alternatively, evolution of material properties and rheology governing the mechanical behaviour of the
184 system (e.g., Heap et al., 2009, 2020) could mean that reservoir failure, promoting resumed eruptive
185 activity, is now harder to achieve. More accurately identifying the nature of the mechanism(s) driving
186 the current deformation, why it has not led to renewed eruptive activity (to date), and the role of a
187 potential decrease in the observed deformation rate (Figure 1) requires additional and longer-term
188 constraints and will enable improved activity forecasting and hazard assessment. However, given the
189 solitary role of a viscoelastic crustal response can be ruled out, the continued pressurisation within the
190 magmatic system is inconsistent with inter-eruptive repose and indicates continuing unrest with

191 potential for renewed eruptive activity. Consequently, while the most recent eruptive activity ended in
192 2010, this may not signal the end of the current eruptive episode at SHV.

193

194 ¹Supplemental Material. Supplementary methods, figures (S1-8) and table. Please visit
195 <https://doi.org/10.1130/XXXX> to access the supplemental material, and contact
196 editing@geosociety.org with any questions.

197

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199

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203

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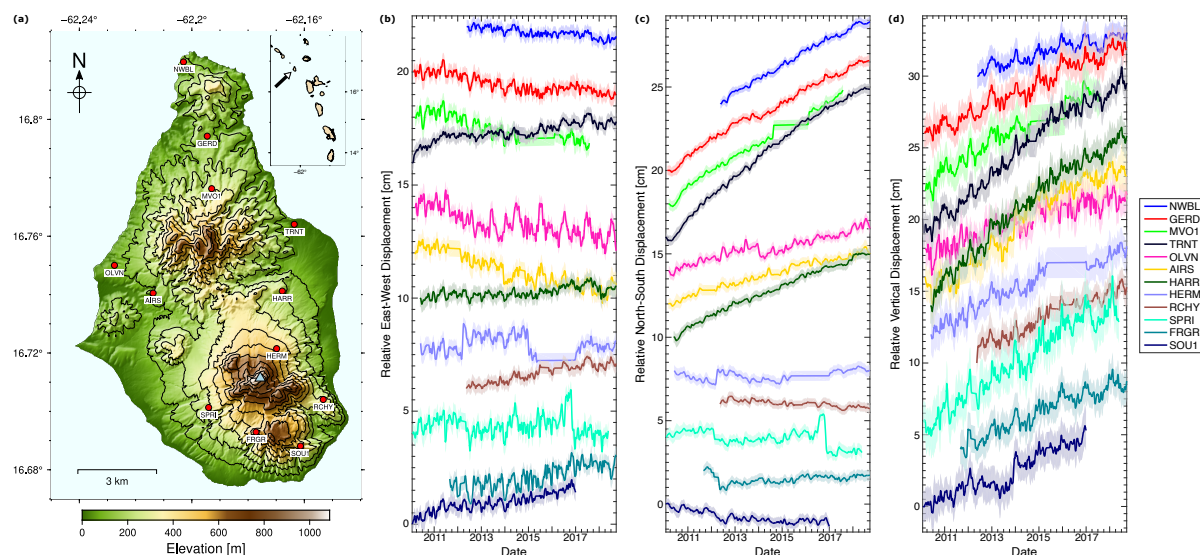
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295 296 FIGURE CAPTIONS

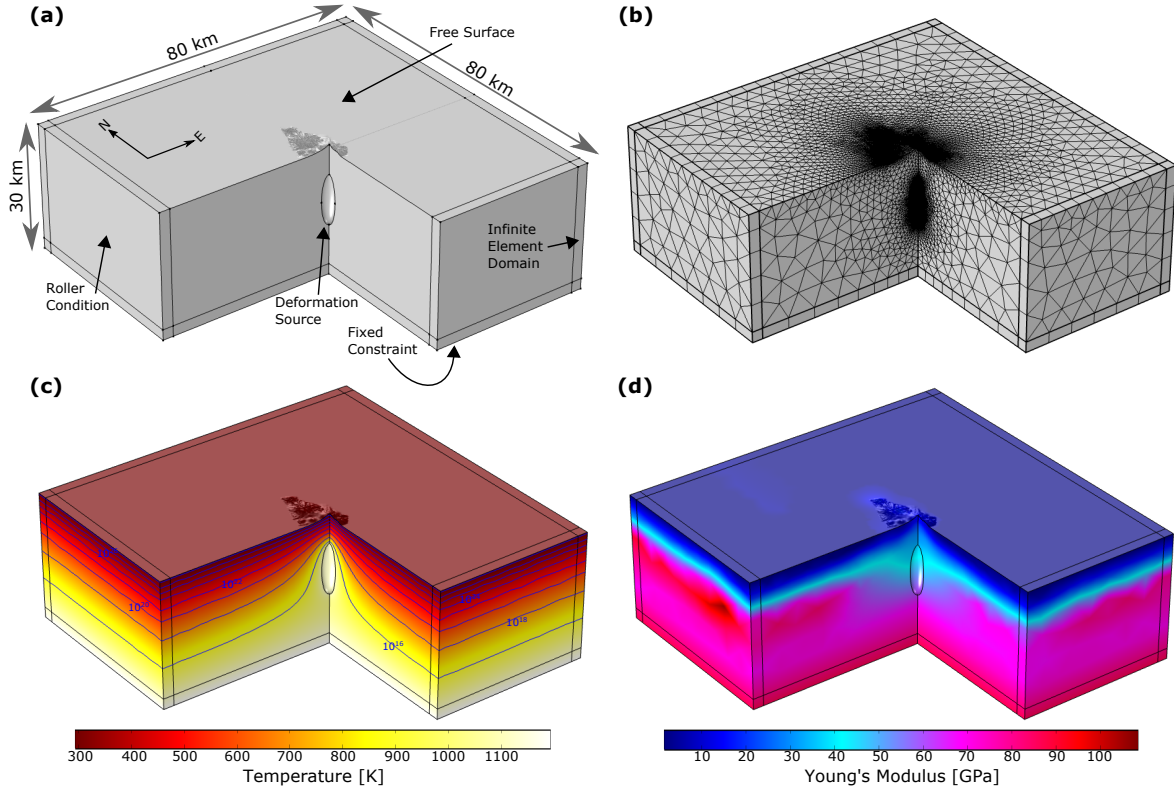


298
 299 **Figure 1:** cGPS network and recorded deformation. (A) DEM of Montserrat showing cGPS stations
 300 (red circles) and active vent (blue triangle). Inset map shows the Eastern Caribbean with Montserrat
 301 indicated by the arrow. (B) Relative east-west deformation with time for the cGPS stations shown in A.

302 Time series are offset in the y-axis for added clarity; shaded bars are 95% confidence bounds. (C)

303 Same as B but for north-south deformation (D) Same as B but for vertical deformation.

304



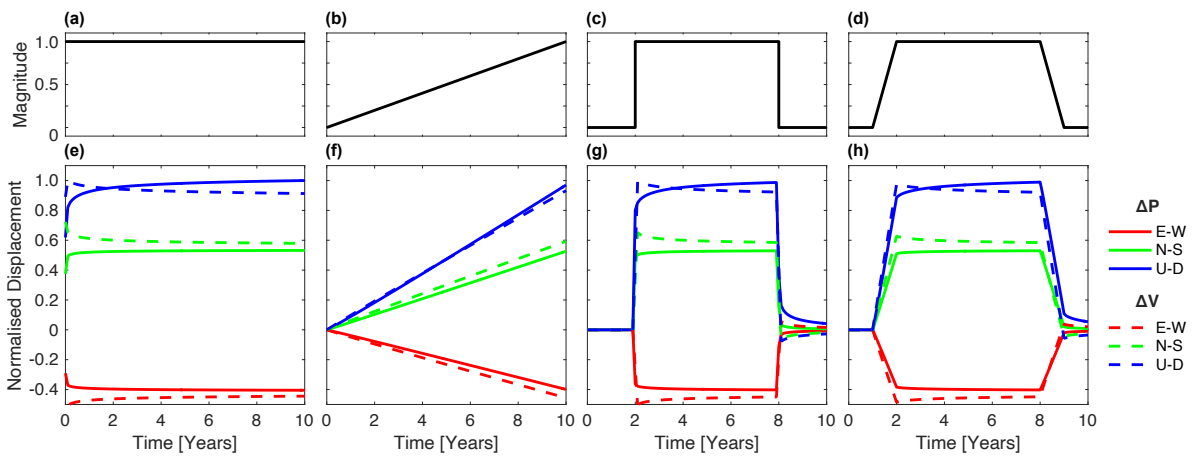
305

306 **Figure 2:** Finite Element Analysis model. (A) Geometry and boundary conditions. (B) Meshed

307 geometry. (C) Modelled steady-state temperature distribution; contours indicate viscosity used in the

308 viscoelastic models. (D) Three-dimensional distribution of static Young's Modulus.

309

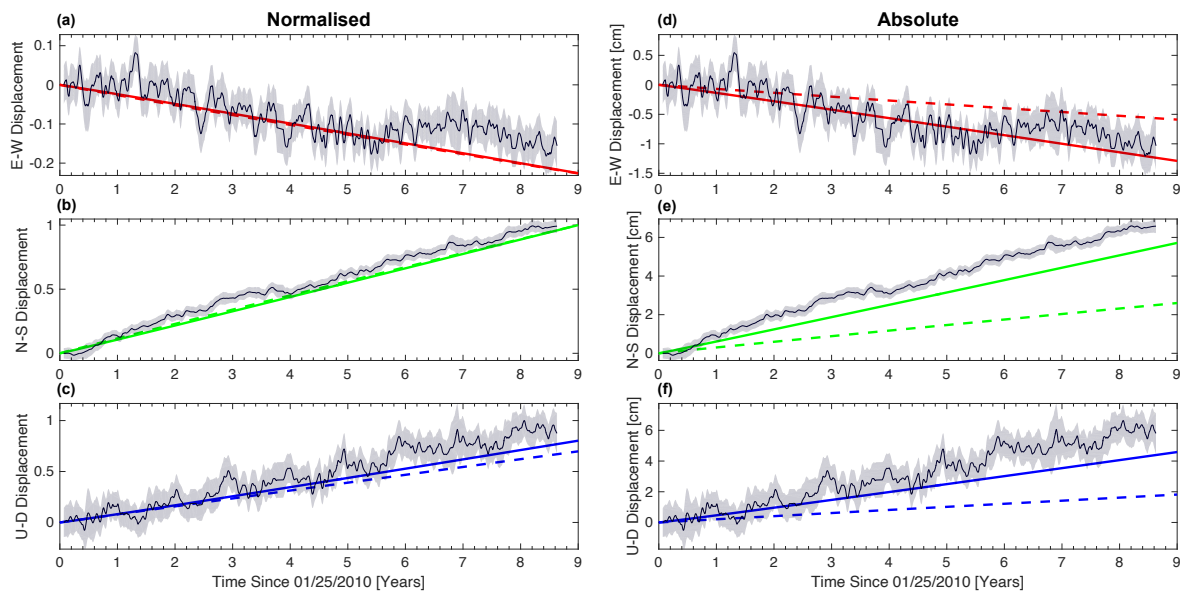


310

311 **Figure 3:** Model source functions and results. (A-D) Temporal functions applied to the deformation

312 source boundary conditions: static (A), ramp (B), instant pulse (C), and gradual pulse (D). (E-H)

313 Normalized displacement timeseries for the AIRS cGPS site for the four temporal functions: static (E),
 314 ramp (F), instant pulse (G), and gradual pulse (H). Solid and dashed lines represent the ΔP and ΔV
 315 boundary conditions, respectively; colours differentiate the 3 components of deformation (red: east-
 316 west, green: north-south, blue: vertical). Results are normalized to the maximum deformation across
 317 the 3 components and across the 4 model functions (in this case vertical and static). The same
 318 temporal trends are seen in other cGPS site locations (Supplementary Figures 3 & 4).
 319



320

321 **Figure 4:** Normalised and absolute model-data comparison for cGPS site GERD and the ramp
 322 temporal source function. (A-C) Normalised surface displacements for the east-west (A), north-south
 323 (B) and vertical (C) components, where the thin black line and shaded grey region display the
 324 recorded deformation and error bounds, and the solid and dashed coloured lines show the model
 325 results for a ΔP and ΔV boundary condition, respectively. Model and data are normalized to the
 326 maximum absolute deformation across the 3 components (in this case vertical). (D-F) Same as A-C
 327 but the model and data have not been normalized.